

Christmas Tree Purchasing Habits In Greater Cleveland, Ohio, 1957

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By

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Introduction

Christmas tree production has become a highly commercial venture in the past decade or so. Increased plantings ^{1/} may lead to serious marketing problems. Growers are interested in consumer preference and buying patterns so as to satisfy the consumer, maximize profit and aid in orderly marketing.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this publication is to show what consumers' purchasing habits of Christmas trees and greenery in greater Cleveland, Ohio were in the 1957 season. A similar study of this type was conducted by the author and Kenneth Quigley, Central States Forest Experiment Station, during the 1956 Christmas marketing season in the Columbus, Ohio area. ^{2/} This report will summarize results of the Cleveland survey, and draw comparisons between it and the Columbus survey. This research is one phase of a project - Hatch 146 - "The Growing and Marketing of Christmas Trees and Greenery in Ohio" conducted jointly by the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station and the Central States Forest Experiment Station. ^{3/} There being comparatively little known about the marketing of Christmas trees, this report should prove useful to producers, wholesalers, and retailers.

^{1/} Quigley, K. L. and Mitchell, G. H., Ohio-Grown Christmas Trees - Production and Marketing, Technical Paper 152, Central States Forest Experiment Station, Columbus, Ohio, May, 1958.

^{2/} Mitchell, G. H. and Quigley, K. L., Christmas Tree Purchasing Habits of Greater Columbus, Ohio Consumers - 1956. Mimeograph bulletin AE 287, Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, Wooster, Ohio, December, 1956.

^{3/} A contributing project to regional project NQM-20, Production and Marketing of Christmas Trees in the North Central Region.

Methodology

The method used in collecting data on the survey was telephone interviewing. ^{4/} A sample of 332 families was chosen at random from the Cleveland telephone directory. A cross-section of the Cleveland area was obtained. Included in the study was Cleveland proper and most of the surrounding suburb communities in Cuyahoga County.

Facts About the Cleveland, Ohio Area ^{5/}

The greater Cleveland metropolitan area as of January 1, 1958 has a population of 1,719,700 - eleventh in the nation. This largest Ohio city is located in Northeastern Ohio on Lake Erie. There is an estimated 517,800 households in the area. The average income per household is \$7,572 which is seventh highest in the nation.

Trees Purchased

Sixty-seven percent of the families interviewed either purchased or were given a tree. Also, approximately 8.8 percent of the families either purchased or had an artificial tree. Of the consumers questioned, the vast majority (218) purchased one tree; two purchased two trees; and one purchased three trees. One household purchased a bundle of trees numbering 10.

Those families not purchasing a tree gave many reasons. In addition to having an artificial tree, these reasons included religious reasons, away for the holidays, no children, too old, and sickness in the family. (Note Table I)

^{4/} Mitchell, G. H. and Rogers, E. M., "Telephone Interviewing", Journal of Farm Economics, Vol. XL, No. 3, August, 1958, pg. 743.

^{5/} All information obtained from Sales Management, May 10, 1958, Bill Brothers Publication Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, pg. 142. All information is for January 1, 1958.

Households not purchasing a tree averaged 2.3 persons; those households purchasing a tree averaged 3.9 persons. Evidently, presence of children in the family were a factor in Christmas tree purchasing. Those purchasing a tree tended to have a slightly higher income than those not purchasing a tree. Families not purchasing trees had a higher percent (61.68 percent) of persons over 51 years of age than did households purchasing trees (19.11 percent).

Households which used artificial trees had a smaller size of family (2.31 persons) than did those families purchasing Christmas trees (3.9). They were approximately equal in family size to those not purchasing any trees (2.3) but had higher incomes than this group. Over seventy-two percent of the families using an artificial tree had one or more persons over 50 years of age.

Time of Purchase

Christmas Day was a Wednesday in 1957. Most trees (76.44 percent) were purchased during the week preceding Christmas - December 18-24. Twenty percent of those interviewed purchased their trees in the previous week - December 11-17. Only 3.5 percent purchased trees previous to December 11. The two Saturdays (December 14 and 21) were the largest sales days - 22 percent of all trees were purchased then. (See Chart I)

Place of Purchase

Approximately one-half of all trees were purchased from regular Christmas tree lots. Thirteen and one-half percent of the Christmas trees were purchased from a nursery. Independent grocers sold 6.2 percent of the total trees, whereas fraternal lots sold 7.1 percent of the total trees. About 5 percent of those questioned had trees given them.

When asked if the place of purchase were on their regular marketing route, the affirmative and negative answers were fairly evenly divided - 53.4 percent and 46.6 percent, respectively. Forty-six percent stated that the lot where the tree was purchased was within one mile of their home. About 10 percent of those interviewed traveled over 10 miles to purchase their trees. Seven and one-half percent of the consumers interviewed purchased a tree within one block of their homes. (Note Chart II)

Who Selects a Tree

In the great majority of cases (96.44 percent), an adult was present at the purchase of the tree. The average number of adults was about midway between one and two (1.49). Children were present in about 40 percent of the cases interviewed.

When asked who actually decided to purchase the tree, the father chose it about 30 percent of the time. The mother in the household chose the tree roughly one-fourth of the time. In 32 percent of the cases, the family decided jointly on the tree. In only 7.5 percent of the cases were children allowed to pick the tree.

Do Persons Shop Around for Christmas Trees

Two-thirds of those persons interviewed purchased their tree at the first lot visited. When asked why they did not buy elsewhere, most persons gave convenience, poor selection, or habit (always buy there) as reasons. (See Table II)

One-third of the interviewees had bought from the same lot the previous year. One-fourth purchased at the same place two years previous (1955).

Only 7 percent of the consumers had seen or heard Christmas trees advertised. Newspapers were the most effective medium of advertisement.

When asked if they tried to buy the best tree on the lot, most persons (69.3 percent) answered in the affirmative.

Price of Trees

The average consumer who purchased a cut tree paid \$4.13 per tree. The average price for all trees, both cut and live, was \$4.38. The average price of live trees was \$8.45. Households with higher incomes tended to have a higher percent purchasing trees. (Note Table IV)

Size of Trees Purchased

The estimated height of trees purchased varied from two feet to twelve feet. The most popular height was 6 feet - 32 percent preferring this size. The five feet size was the next most popular. Chart III explains this in more detail.

Location of Tree in the House

A small percent (6.7 percent) of those interviewed placed their trees in the center of the room. However, the great majority of households either put their tree in a corner (24.8 percent) or near a window (48.7 percent). This would seem to indicate that Christmas trees, once in the home, do not have to be perfect on all sides.

Species Bought

Scotch pine was the most popular tree by a sizeable margin - one-third of the consumers purchasing trees. The general classifications of spruce and pine were next in acceptance with 12 percent each. Nine percent of those interviewed had purchased balsam fir. A rather important segment (21 percent) stated they did not know the species of their Christmas tree. (Note Table III)

Knowledge of Tree

In addition to not knowing the species purchased, many persons knew very little about their trees in general. When asked if their tree was locally grown or imported, 64 percent said they did not know. Of the remainder, 13.3 percent said it was locally grown and 20 percent thought it was imported.

The respondents were asked to identify their tree as to type of needles. Sixty-five percent said their tree had long needles. Another one-third said it had short needles.

Live Trees

There were 17 live trees purchased by households in the sample. The average price paid was \$8.45. Average family income for those purchasing a live tree was not significantly different from average family income of the entire sample.

Other Greenery

Approximately one-fourth of all families interviewed purchased Christmas greenery other than trees. Half of the one-fourth purchased loose branches. The remaining half included mistletoe (20 percent), wreaths (12.5 percent), and cones (13 percent).

Families purchasing greenery had higher incomes, on the average, than those not purchasing greenery or those purchasing live trees.

Size of Family

As shown in Table V, families with only 1 or 2 in the family purchased significantly less trees per household unit. Roughly, only two-fifths of the two persons family units purchased Christmas trees. However, the ratio

of persons to trees was more favorable in the two-person family unit (4.9 persons to one tree) than the five person (5.4), six person (5.6), seven person or over (7.1) family units.

Some Conclusions and Comparisons Between Columbus and Cleveland

Overall, there was a close relationship between consumer purchases of Christmas trees in Cleveland and Columbus. However, during the 1956 season in Columbus, 72 percent of the families purchased Christmas trees. In 1957, 67 percent of the families purchased trees in Cleveland. Artificial trees were more of a factor in Cleveland (8.8 percent of the total) than in Columbus (3 percent).

In both cities, Saturday was the "biggest" day for Christmas tree purchases - 22 percent of the total purchases in Cleveland and 25 percent of the total purchases in Columbus. The majority (50 percent) of all Christmas tree purchases were made at regular Christmas tree lots in both cities. Nurseries were more important in selling trees in Cleveland. The number of adults present at the purchase, as well as the member of the household choosing the tree, was practically the same in both sample surveys.

Both surveys pointed out the fact that most families do not shop around for a tree - two-thirds of those questioned purchased at the first lot visited. However, average price paid for a cut tree was about \$1 more in Cleveland. The price paid for a living tree was about the same in both cases. Consumers in both cities preferred and bought a six foot tree. The tree was located in either a corner or near a window in a great majority of cases in both Columbus and Cleveland.

There was a great disparity in species purchased. In Cleveland, scotch pine was the most popular (33 percent of the total trees purchased) but in

Columbus, balsam fir was the most popular (25 percent of the total). Only 10 percent chose balsam fir in Cleveland, whereas Scotch pine was chosen by only 8 percent in Columbus.

Consumers in both cities had little general knowledge about the tree purchased. In both, about 65 percent did not know if their tree was locally grown or imported from another state. Many persons do not know species.

Slightly more Cleveland consumers bought live trees than those in Columbus. About 20 to 25 percent purchased greenery other than trees in both instances. Most of these purchased loose branches.

Due to the increase of persons per Christmas tree, after the family unit reaches five, care should be exercised in projecting population increases on a strict linear basis in regard to Christmas tree consumption.

Families of one or two persons have less units purchasing trees. On the basis of persons per tree, families of two persons consume more trees than do families of five persons or more.

With one-fourth to one-third of the households not purchasing trees, considerable attention should be spent on selling this market. Advertising, particularly aimed at the older age groups, might help.

Improved knowledge of species and the fact that the trees are home grown might aid local growers to move their trees to Ohio consumers.

Plantation grown trees in the United States are increasing in numbers. Growers will do well to analyze their own operations and particular markets to meet the expected increase in competition.

Table I

Reasons Given for not Having a Christmas Tree,
Greater Cleveland, Ohio Consumer Survey, 1957

Reason	Percent of Families Interviewed
Religion	14.9%
Going away for holidays	4.6
No children	14.9
Too old	24.2
Sickness	1.8
Artificial tree	27.1
Miscellaneous	12.5

Table II

Reasons for not Purchasing Christmas Trees Elsewhere,
Greater Cleveland, Ohio Christmas Tree Purchases,
1957

Reason	Percent of Families Interviewed
Convenience	13.27%
Too expensive	3.98
Poor selection	13.27
Not correct variety	2.65
Personal friend	3.54
Always buy there	11.52
Given a tree	.44
Miscellaneous	21.24
No reply	30.09

Table III

Consumer Identification of Christmas Trees and Average Prices Paid
as Stated in Consumer Interviews, Cleveland, Ohio 1957

Species	Percent	Average Price	Species	Percent	Average Price
Balsam Fir	9.78	\$3.61	Austrian Pine	1.33	\$4.00
Douglas Fir	.88	5.25	Spruce	12.44	4.07
Pine	12.44	4.25	Blue Spruce	2.22	5.25
Scotch Pine	32.88	3.96	Norway Spruce	.44	5.00
Red Pine	.88	4.25	Cedar	1.77	2.92
White Pine	.44	3.50	Hemlock	.44	4.50

Table IV

Family Income Groups Differentiated by Percent Purchasing
Christmas Trees and also by Prices Paid for Trees

Family Income Group	Percent* of Total Purchasing Trees	Percent* of Total Not Buying Trees	Average Price Paid
Over \$10,000	21.33	14.02	\$5.87
\$7,001-10,000	33.77	12.15	3.59
5,501-7,000	24.89	24.30	3.66
4,001-5,500	4.89	9.35	3.63
2,501-4,000	2.22	28.97	2.99
1,001-2,500	12.44	9.35	3.50
Under \$1,000	.44	.89	2.81

* Does not add up to 100% due to non-replies.

Table V

Use of Christmas Trees by Size of Family Unit, 1958

Persons in Family	Family Units Without a Christmas Tree (percent)	Family Units With a Christmas Tree (percent)	Ratio of Persons to Christmas Trees
1	95.8	4.2	24.0
2	59.4	40.6	4.9
3	18.8	81.2	3.1
4	12.1	87.9	4.5
5	7.8	92.2	5.4
6	9.5	90.5	6.6
7 or more	7.7	92.3	7.1
Total	32.2	67.8	4.7

Table VI

Use of Christmas Trees by Size of Family Unit
Columbus, Ohio, 1956

Persons in Family	Families Without Trees (percent)	Families With Trees (percent)	Ratio of Persons to Trees
1	90.5	9.5	10.5
2	49.4	50.6	3.8
3	16.1	83.9	3.2
4	9.3	90.7	4.3
5	15.8	84.2	5.9
6	6.3	93.7	6.0
7 or more	8.3	91.7	9.1
Total	29.3	70.7	4.6

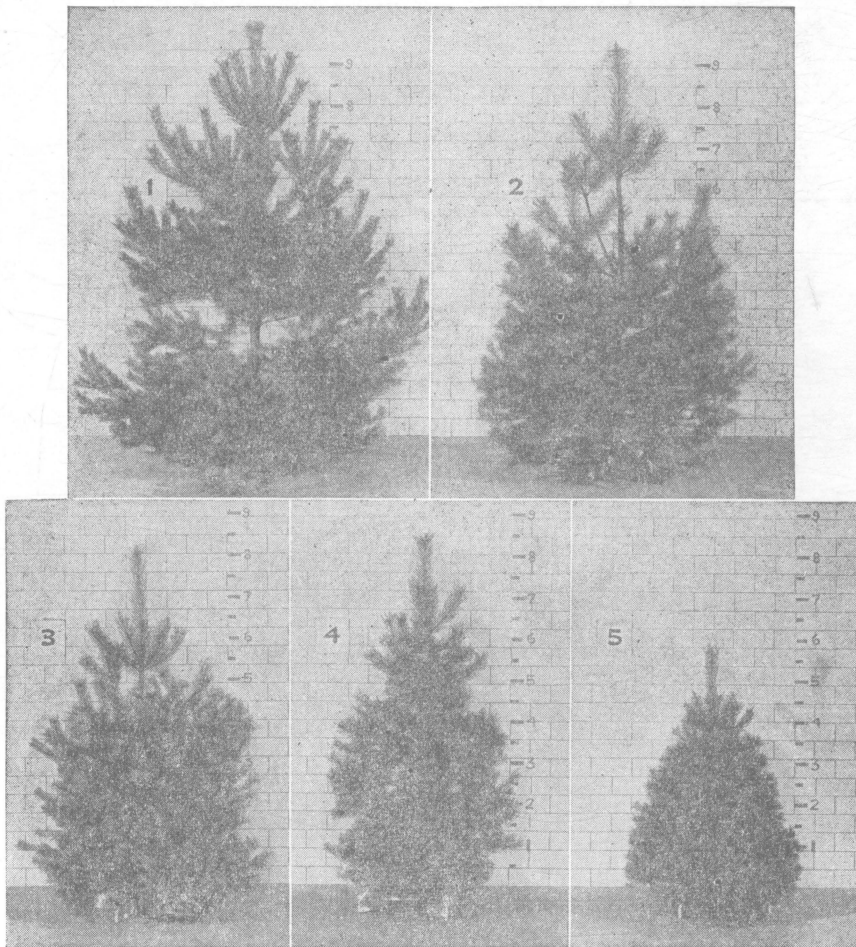


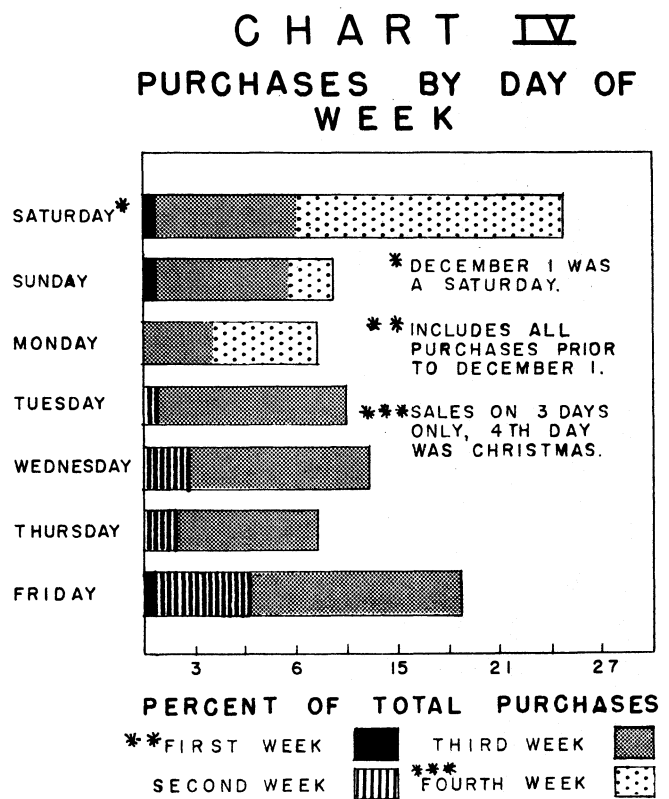
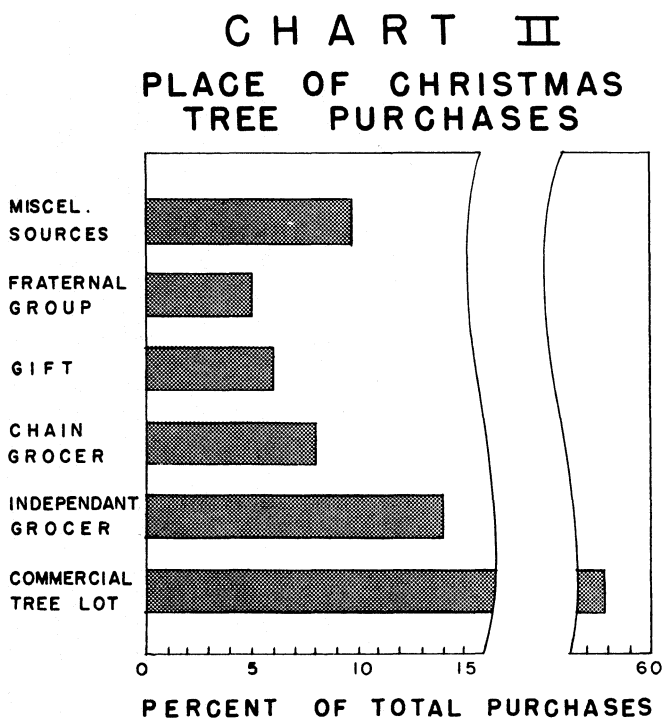
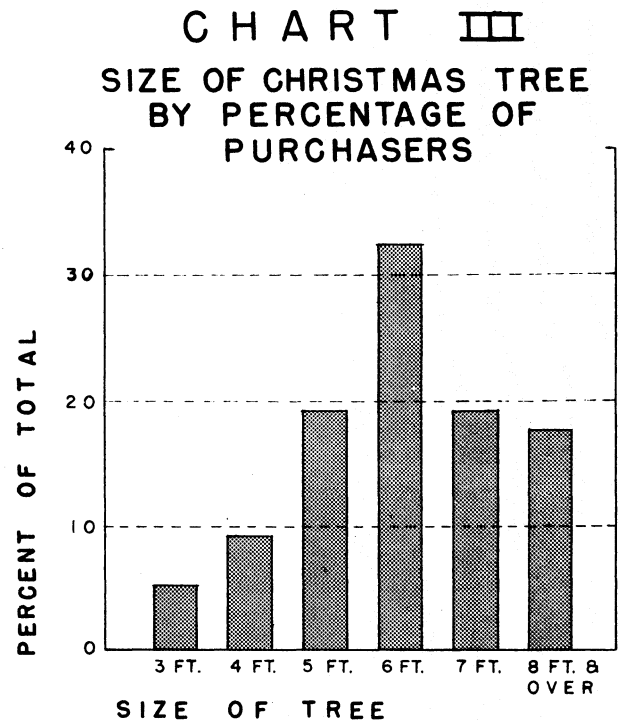
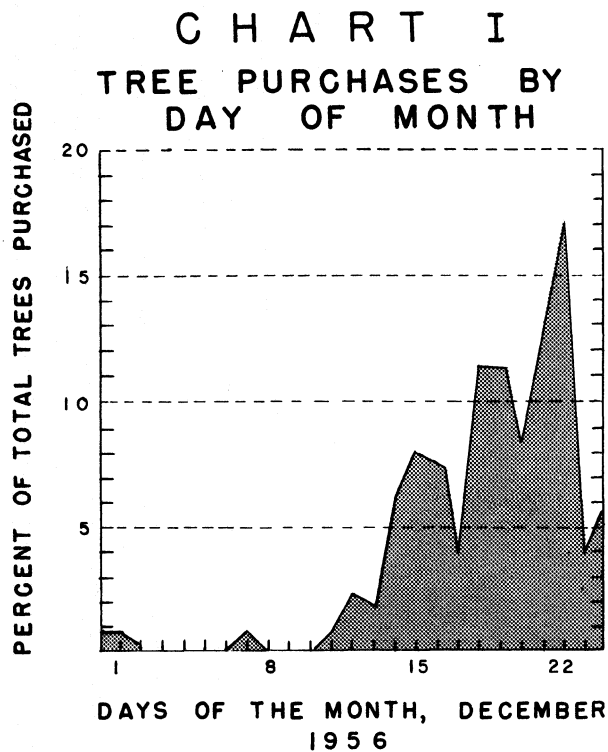
Figure 5

**Appearance of Scotch pine (Riga strain) when sheared in June
as compared to unsheared trees.**

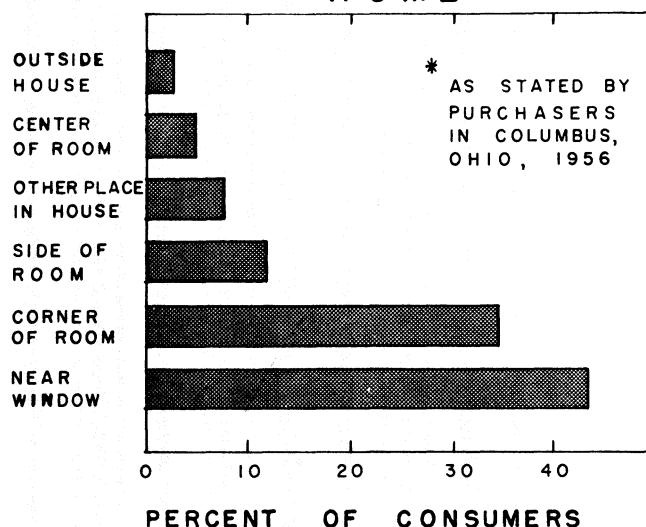
- (1) Check, not sheared.**
- (2) Sheared in June the third year after planting.**
- (3) Sheared in June the third and fourth years.**
- (4) Sheared in June the third and fifth years.**
- (5) Sheared in June the third, fourth and fifth years.**

**(2), (3), (4), and (5) were sheared lightly in June of the sixth year to
shape up trees prior to harvest.**

CONSUMER CHRISTMAS TREE PURCHASING HABITS COLUMBUS, OHIO, 1956



C H A R T V LOCATION OF CHRISTMAS TREES IN THE ROOM OR HOME*



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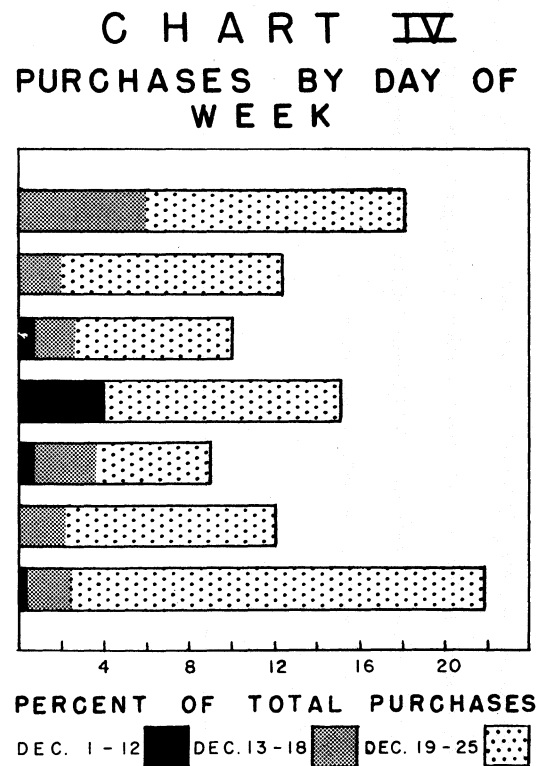
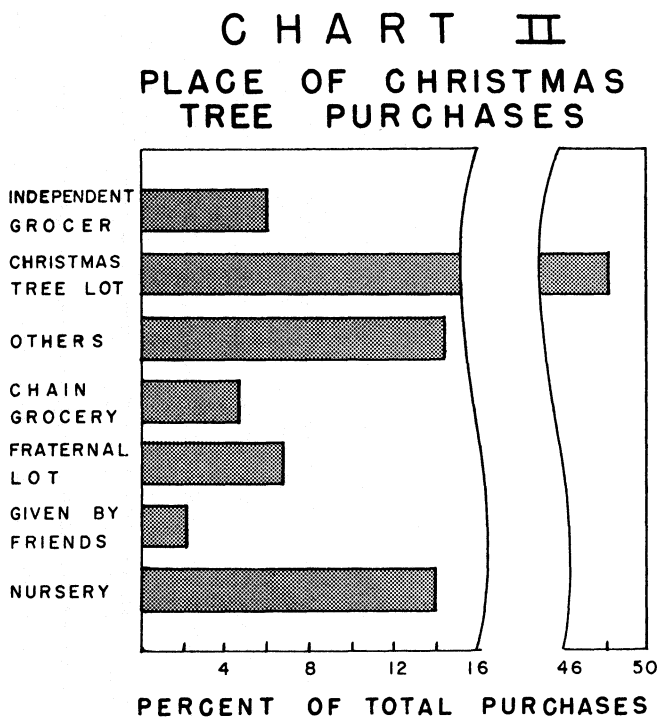
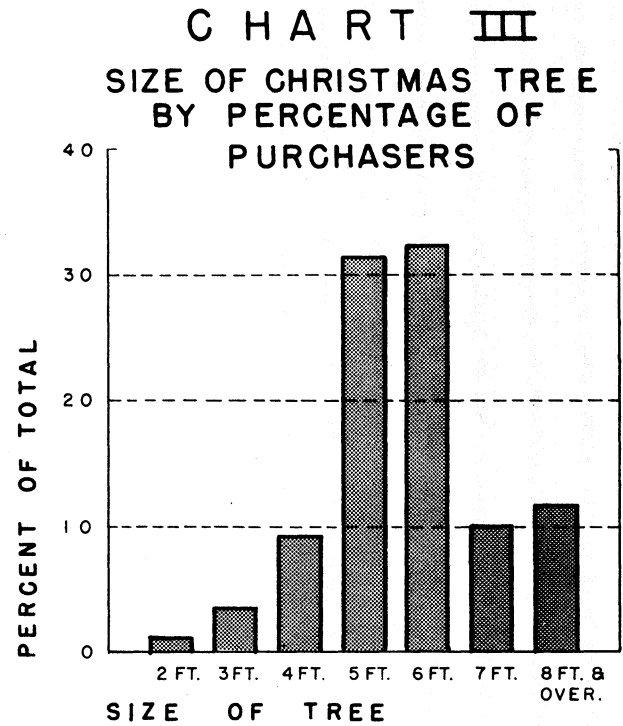
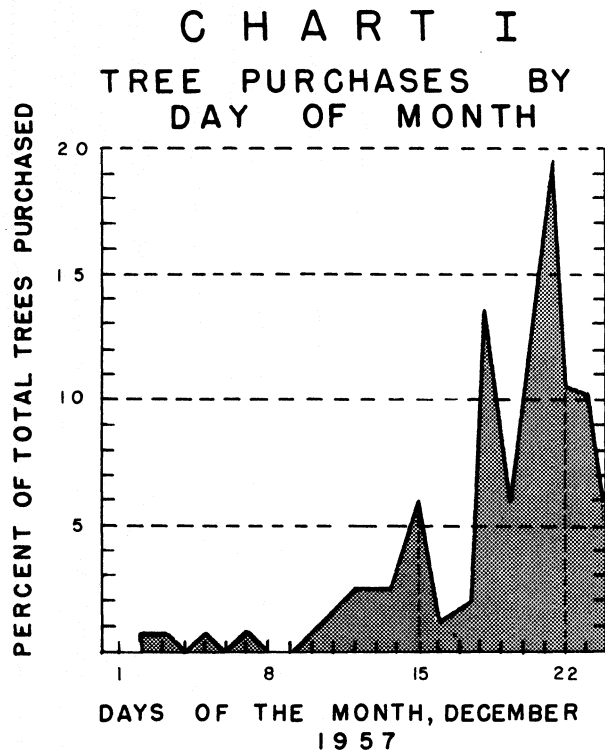
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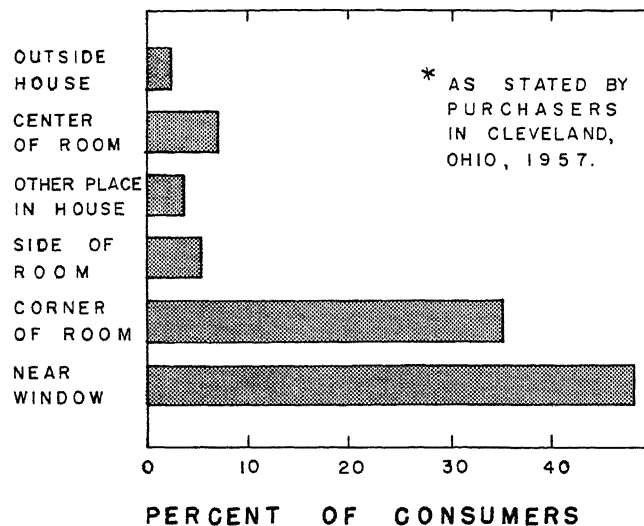
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